

# Trouble in North Caucasus

**General Anatoliy S. Kulikov, Former Russian Interior Minister**

Translated by Robert R. Love

*As Commander in Chief, Internal Troops of Russia's Interior Ministry, this article's author, General Anatoliy S. Kulikov, commanded Russian forces in Chechnya following their capture of the capital city, Grozny. He also directed pacification operations in the rest of the republic. Hence, when he writes about Chechnya and the North Caucasus, he speaks from firsthand experience. More recently, he served as minister of the interior, where he was responsible for combating Russia's staggering organized crime. He draws on that experience, describing here the impact of crime in the North Caucasus.*

*Although his professional life has involved maintaining internal order, Kulikov does not see military force as the solution to the problems in the North Caucasus. He believes that military action alone, without accompanying political and economic measures, may provide a short-term solution, but it will not resolve the underlying causes. Rather, he favors political, economic and international diplomatic measures in the region.*

*A hot spot and likely locale of future conflict, the volatile Caucasus region represents a situation that an American expeditionary force might face. In this region the central government has lost control, crime is rampant, law and order are nonexistent and religious extremism has made dramatic inroads. Further, problems in this region imply that Moscow could eventually lose central control of the federation, a circumstance whose impact could reach well beyond the borders of the North Caucasus.*

*Kulikov wrote this article in the summer of 1998, and problems in the North Caucasus continue. Although a 1996 accord halted the war in Chechnya, it did not resolve the problem but merely postponed*

*(until 31 December 2001) the question of whether Chechnya will remain a part of the Russian Federation or gain full independence. In March 1999, Russia's top envoy to Chechnya, a general officer from the Russian Interior Ministry, was kidnapped. In response, the Interior Ministry deployed more troops to the Chechen border region and threatened force if the hostage was not released. Later that same month, an explosion rocked a public market place in the North Caucasus city of Vladikavkaz, killing 60 people. Vladikavkaz is the capital of the North Ossetia region and lies just 30 miles from the Chechen border. In general, tension continues throughout the region, particularly in Dagestan, where the Russians worry about Chechen separatist activities and the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>1</sup>*

— Robert Love, Translator

**T**HE ENTIRE CAUCASUS region, including Russia's North Caucasus, is a hub of intense economic and political problems. These problems concern Russia, its neighboring states and the entire world. Today the North Caucasus is a segment in a ribbon of instability stretching from Yugoslavia to Tajikistan. Unlike the Transdnistria or Tajikistan, the potentially explosive North Caucasus is a conflict zone where Europe and Asia come together, a place where Islamic-Christian and Indo-European-Turkic civilizations meet.

The Chechen separatists' publicly stated intent to create a unified Muslim state to oppose Russia and other Christian states is an important factor in the North Caucasus' political instability. Dagestan, Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, Kabardino-Balkariya, Northern Ossetia and Ingushetia would all be included as part of this Muslim state. The Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus, in which the Chechens play the leading role, regards a unified Islamic state as the union's primary purpose.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not purport to reflect the position of the Department of the Army; the Department of Defense or any other government office or agency.—Editor

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This attempt to create a unified Muslim state is gaining increased geopolitical importance, especially in Russia and other states in this zone. This situation will probably affect other nations, since it will doubtless cause general international instability. The smoldering centers of conflict in the Caucasus and Trans-Caucasus, including those in the areas of the Armenian-Azerbaijanis, the Chechens, the Ossetian-Ingush, the South Ossetians, the Abkhazians and the Lezgins, are already negatively affecting the situation in the North Caucasus region, as well as Georgia and Azerbaijan. All of this exacerbates economic difficulties in the region's republics, increases crime and criminality, damages the social environment and spawns profuse political, economic and social problems.

The factors behind this crisis situation are historical, ethno-national, economic, religious and cultural. Some are deeply rooted in time, while others emerged only recently. However, it is difficult to agree with those who state that today's problems and troubles in the Northern Caucasus owe exclusively to Russia's centuries-old colonial policy in the region. The causes underlying this potentially explosive situation are broad and multilayered. Certainly the Russian government's mistakes did impact on the developments in the area. These mistakes began in the czarist era and continue to the present day. The so-called imperial factor in Moscow's policies toward the North Caucasus had a decided impact, particularly during the Soviet period and even in this past decade. The Russian leadership has not had a clear and consistent policy that would posit acceptable solutions to the complex and confused tangle of ethno-national, political, religious and social relations in this region. Instead, Russian policy has oscillated between using military force and tolerating extreme nationalists.

Because of their geography and socio-economics, the peoples of the Caucasus have traditionally leaned toward Russia as an economically and militarily powerful state. They have sought support and

protection from their stronger neighbors. At one time or another, most peoples of the Caucasus have voluntarily expressed a desire to join Russia. It was Russian involvement and support that allowed these people to preserve and develop their political system and economic base, particularly crucial for those who had been living at an essentially primitive-communal level. They could now meet the demands of modern civilization—survival but also enhanced national self-awareness and culture. Russia's arrival on the scene meant that a powerful industrial base and scientific potential could develop alongside traditional trades and vocations. Science and industry provided the economic basis for development in the Caucasus, refuting any contention that Russia exploited the North Caucasus as a colony.

Without a doubt, Moscow's mistakes in its North Caucasus policy negatively affected the current situation. However, since I am familiar with the Caucasus peoples' way of thinking, I believe the current destructive processes in the region are due primarily to Russia's own weaker economic and political situation, rather than to Moscow's policy mistakes in the region. Russia's weakened state is the reason certain forces in the North Caucasus republics seek new, wealthier and more influential patrons outside Russia's borders. This search is disguised according to a well-known scenario—as a struggle for so-called national self-determination. For example, the Chechen leaders publicly state that they have been fighting a war of independence with Russia for 400 years. However, no large-scale armed clashes with the Chechen population were recorded until the middle of the last century. Further, the Chechen leaders are silent about Russia's preeminent role in developing the republic's economic and industrial complexes, which provided for the well being of the population. In addition, as a constituent member of the Russian Federation, Chechnya has received and continues to receive material and financial help from Russia. Its citizens are educated in Russia, and it avails itself of other social benefits. Russia has been and remains a benefactor for other states in the North Caucasus as well.

In turn, the mistakes of Russia's political leadership were a unique catalyst in hastening the negative processes in the region. However, this process was typical throughout the former Soviet Union, and once the Baltic states began to pull away, others followed. The situation is similar in Chechnya today.

Indisputably, the greatest problem for Russia in the North Caucasus is the "Chechen issue," the fact

that a state within the Russian Federation's borders does not recognize Russian federal laws and therefore threatens the integrity and security of Russia. Russian authorities seek to resolve the Chechen issue so as to overcome separatist trends in the region, strengthen the federation and fortify Russia's political and military-strategic positions in the Caucasus as a whole. Resolution would prevent armed banditry, terrorism and narcotrafficking from spreading into other regions of Russia, as well as into countries of the Near and Far Abroad and protect Russia's economic interests in Caspian Sea oil.<sup>2</sup>

The problems in the North Caucasus headline the complex political relations between Moscow and the Chechen Republic. The situation is acute because the Chechen leadership does not want to postpone a decision on Chechnya's status and has tenaciously pursued full diplomatic relations between Russia and Chechnya, despite previous agreements. To achieve its goals, the Chechen leadership uses political and criminal terrorism.

The Chechen hotbed is the epicenter of the vast troubled region that includes the entire eastern sector of the North Caucasus: Dagestan, which is destabilized by neighboring Chechnya and multiple ethno-national conflicts; the Ossetian-Ingush conflict zone; and the areas of the Stavropol region [*krai*] bordering on Chechnya. The socio-political environment in the region's western sector (Kabardino-Balkariya, Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, Adygeya and the Krasnodar region [*krai*]), though less tense, is also difficult and requires constant attention.

The Chechen leadership has already begun to force the formation of an independent Islamic state stretching from Georgia to the Caspian Sea. This "Great Imamate" would control a key sector of the Caspian region.<sup>3</sup> The Chechen leaders' efforts have led to the region's critical situation. In the summer of 1997 the Chechen leaders founded the "Islamic Nation" movement, whose goal is to unite Chechnya and Dagestan as an imamate inside "historical borders." Thirty-five Islamic parties from both of these republics have joined the movement and elected a parliament, called the *medzhlis*. This parliament actively propagates the historic memory of the Chechen and Dagestan mountain peoples with tales of the Caucasian War (1834-1859) and the heroic deeds of their common great leader, the Imam Shamil (1797-1877).

For the 200th anniversary of the imam's birth, leaders of the Avarian People's Front and the Lak movement, called "Kazi-Kumukh," traveled from



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Dagestan to the Chechen village of Veden, the imam's birthplace. Their celebration's mottos included: "Chechnya and Dagestan—forever together and free," and "Peace is not given—it is won." Among groups from Dagestan that joined the "Islamic Nation" were the "Caucasus" movement; the party of the people's movement of Dagestan; the Islamic Party of Dagestan; the Socio-Political Organization of Dagestan, "Nur"; and the Dagestan branch of the Union of Moslems of Russia.

Due to increasing instability on the Dagestan-Chechen border, different ethnic groups, such as Laks, Russians and Terek Cossacks, are leaving these areas. Other groups are moving in to take their

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place, such as the Chechens-Akkins. While most of them reside permanently in Dagestan, they nevertheless consider themselves citizens of Chechnya and support the most aggressive elements there. Increasingly, Chechen fighters are finding their allies in Dagestan among the members of the most radical Islamic fundamentalists, the Wahhabis.<sup>4</sup> The Wahhabis see Chechnya as a practical beginning of a Moslem state and applaud the establishment of Islamic order there. Shari'a courts and public executions have been introduced in Chechnya. Each new demonstration of power by the Chechen fighters in Dagestan reinforces those committed to reuniting Dagestan with Chechnya. Chechnya's influence on Dagestan is spreading incrementally. The Wahhabis purchase weapons and store them in hidden caches, simultaneously seeking to move their own people into positions as muftis and village mullahs, often successfully.

One basic mission of Dagestan separatists is to force federal structures from the republic and to weaken Dagestan law enforcement bodies. To carry out these tasks, Chechen extremists use multiple tactics:

- They fire on posts, mine the travel routes of mobile groups, take military service personnel hostage, and conduct other acts of intimidation.
- They encourage the inhabitants of Dagestan to hold mass demonstrations calling for the withdrawal of federal forces.

Analysts forecast Chechnya's most likely actions to destabilize the general North Caucasus situation. The first will be strengthening and expanding Chechnya's sphere of influence in the Northern Caucasus region through political extortion and other provocation, including hostage taking. It is highly probable that specially trained, armed personnel will use terrorism and raid critical facilities on Russian territory. The second likely step will be activity to draw the peoples of Ingushetia and Dagestan into the "liberation struggle against the Russian occupiers." Finally, Chechnya will con-

tinue to force recognition of its sovereignty.

To assess the danger that Chechnya poses for the North Caucasus and Russia as a whole, it is important to look at the processes occurring inside Chechnya itself. The socio-political situation in the Chechen Republic remains unstable. After signing the 31 August 1996 Khasavyurt accord, Chechnya almost immediately began abrogating the agreements it had made, demonstrating to the world its goal—complete independence.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, Moscow's vague position on Chechnya, including its self-determination, allows Chechnya to engage in these activities virtually unhindered.

In February 1997, Chechnya held free elections with Moscow's consent, and many international observers were present. Aslan Maskhadov was elected president of the Chechen Republic. Neither the elections nor the presence of the observers enhanced the authority of the Russian president or government. Further, the Chechen population thinks these events legitimize their country's independence. Most Chechens are buoyed by this pride in defeating big Russia.

Because the Chechen public perceives any doubts about independence as an act of national betrayal, none are expressed. Chechen politicians exploit Russophobia, the memory of the war and Chechen casualties in it. Even moderate Chechen politicians view Russia as merely an economic benefactor obliged to compensate Chechnya for the damage Russian troops inflicted. In January 1998 Shamil Basayev, whom Russia considered a criminal and terrorist, took office as head of state. Neither Maskhadov nor Basayev is agreeable to even the weakest confederation with Russia, even if Chechnya were to become an equal partner with Russia. They expect and demand nothing less than Russia's full and unconditional recognition of Chechnya's independence.

Moscow has no control whatsoever over state bodies formed in Chechnya. Shari'a courts, for example, are replacing secular judicial bodies in Chechnya. Judges will now be guided by the Koran, the sunna and the traditional Moslem law of the Shari'a, backed by leading Islamic jurists' interpretations of these laws. Chechen jurisprudence has made only one concession to international norms. On 18 April 1997, Chechen Vice-Premier Movladi Udugov announced the decision to halt public firing-squad executions of condemned criminals.

Militarization of Chechnya is ongoing, and a regular army (up to 2,500 men) is being formed and armed. Along with official force structures, includ-



Yuri Pirogov, *Itogi*

Russian soldiers at an outpost guarding only a small piece of the Chechen-Dagestan border.

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ing the national guard, the presidential guard, the Shari’a guard, the national security service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (all of which number about 10,000 personnel), there are also a number of semiofficial and unofficial organizations not under Maskhadov’s control. The latter are mostly detachments belonging to various field commanders, and their total manpower numbers around 5,000. Further, there is a network of terrorist training camps, the most important being the Khattab training center. There, students study military subjects including guerilla tactics, combat in urban terrain and in the mountains, subversive activity and terrorist acts. Even though the Chechen Republic has tried more than once to bring these armed groups under control and merge them into the official power structures, the most influential field commanders have maintained command of their subordinate units and exercise virtually absolute control over them within their “zones of responsibility.”

The power that the leaders of these major armed formations wield further attenuates the already limited power and authority of the Chechen president. Moreover, he faces the constant threat that his office and authority will be abolished altogether, to be replaced by the declaration of an imamate and a religious form of rule.

Maskhadov’s attempts to obtain additional authority from the republic’s parliament have failed. The more extreme forces have strengthened their positions in the new government, taking advantage of the support of international terrorist organizations and organized crime groups.

The territory of the Chechen Republic is currently divided into five zones that principal field commanders control. Chechnya’s economy, budget and industrial infrastructure are also divided among the spheres of influence of the largest clans, whose criminal interests reach far beyond the borders of the republic.

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Given Chechnya's extremely difficult socio-economic situation, its society is increasingly criminal. Criminals have virtually no fear of any action by law enforcement bodies. Organized crime members are largely former fighters and have fiercely resisted even feeble official attempts to control crime.

In the meantime, Maskhadov's opponents (Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Salman Raduyev and a number of field commanders) believe they have as much right as Maskhadov to govern the republic. They further believe that Maskhadov is departing from the policy of Dzhokhar Dudayev.<sup>6</sup> Raduyev's authority is growing, because his bluntness has made him the spokesman against Maskhadov's policies. He has often declared his dissatisfaction with the pace of Chechnya's movement toward independence. He imposes on the population his opinion that the government and president are incapable of stabilizing the situation. In many areas, "headquarters" for insubordination to Maskhadov are being created. In addition, to discredit Maskhadov as leader of an independent state, rumors are spread among Chechnya's fighters and the civilian population that Maskhadov has ties to Russian special services. Meanwhile, Raduyev and other Chechen separatist leaders view terrorism as an efficient means of fighting for Chechnya's recognition, and they claim to be preparing for terrorism in Russia.

Meanwhile, many of Chechnya's socio-economic problems go unresolved. The economy is not being rebuilt, and a significant portion of the population is unemployed. Unemployment among young people is at a critical level, and graduates of various educational institutions have no job prospects. The population has a large stock of illegal weapons and the flow of these weapons continues. In recent years a significant portion of the region's population has come to believe that political, economic, social and everyday problems are best solved

by violence, and a cult of "troublemakers" has emerged. Formation of illegal armed groups continues, including those springing from individual social and political movements. The criminal nature of armed groups under Chechen field commanders is readily apparent by their hostage taking and demands for ransom. Chechnya may threaten large-scale terror inside Russia to extract the greatest possible sum from the Russian investment in the Chechen economy.

Chechen leaders cannot influence the field commanders or their armed formations, nor solve any of the republic's everyday socio-economic problems. Hence, they attempt to distract the people and quell their growing dissatisfaction. They do this by further igniting anti-Russian sentiments, inculcating extremist Islamic ideology and carrying out "cosmetic" reorganizations in the government that supposedly show the official government becoming stronger. With the goal of forcing Russia out of the Caucasus completely, foreign fundamentalist Islamic organizations and the special services from a number of states are helping Chechnya move toward becoming an Islamic state. These same organizations are in no rush to help Russia resolve any of Chechnya's social or economic problems.

Attracting foreign investors is the primary task of Chechnya's foreign policy today. On his trip to the United States and Turkey, Maskhadov sought such investments. The Chechen government places great hopes on an alliance with Georgia and has widely advertised its intent to lay a gas pipeline parallel to the planned Chechnya-Georgia highway. According to Maskhadov this plan would enable Chechnya to turn its back on Russia and its face toward Georgia. The harsh official Chechen policy toward Russia and the Islamization of Chechen society seek to unite the people in the face of a "general threat"; curry favor with the rich and influential Islamic world; comply with the recommendations of foreign "sponsors"; and work off the funds received from the latter, to repay their debts, so to speak. Betraying this policy means losing power.

Using all means possible, Chechen foreign policy actively seeks international recognition of the republic's independence and funds to help form such a republic. However, it is unlikely that Chechnya will win the international community's approval in the near term. Without Russia's consent, it is improbable that any members of the international community will recognize Chechnya's independence. First, such an action would set a precedent for yielding to similar separatist demands in

Natalie Medvedev, Itogi



Young Chechen boys—one wearing an Islamic-green bandana—conduct their own version of war games.

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other parts of the world. Second, Chechen leaders do not control the situation in the republic and cannot eradicate the republic's international terrorist centers or curb its unprecedented crime. Third, there are concerns about growing Islamic fundamentalism, Wahhabism in particular.

Increasingly, Chechen leaders are learning that they lack the economic basis necessary for sovereignty. Hence, they have decided to wrest Dagestan away from Russia by force and bring it into Chechnya's sphere of influence. They fully understand that if their plan succeeds, Chechnya gains access to Caspian Sea oil resources and establishes control over the region's key transportation nodes and communication lines. They assume that having control of these resources will bring recognition of Chechnya's independence by states interested in

developing economic relations with the North Caucasus. Even if recognition fails, at the very least large-scale foreign investments would flow into the region.

To implement this plan, the Chechens enlist forces from inside Dagestan, primarily from among ethnic Chechen-Akkins and followers of Wahhabism. Like the Chechen separatists, these groups are financed by international extremist organizations and by the special services in a number of countries.

Chechnya is constructing military facilities along its borders with Dagestan and moving detachments of fighters into those areas. Nevertheless, considering the disposition of forces and the complex ethno-national relations in Dagestan, these armed groups are unlikely to intervene openly. Therefore,

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Chechen separatists, the national extremists and the external groups supporting them all inflame anti-Russian sentiment and trumpet Moslem solidarity.

Russia has set a unique course to resolve the crisis in its relations with Chechnya. This course is new militarily, as well as new relative to the accepted practice in resolving similar conflicts. When a central government is unable to reach an agreement with separatists in a given territory, it does not usually recognize the separatist leaders as having any legal authority. Nonetheless, this does not mean that it cannot negotiate peacefully with such a regime. On the contrary, history shows that such negotiations can continue for decades. However, negotiations are held with a "party to the conflict," not with a lawful government.

Everything is reversed in the conflict between Russia and Chechnya. Russia recognized the legitimacy of Chechnya as a constituent member of the Russian Federation at a time when Chechen authorities recognize neither Russia's laws nor its authority on its own territory. Moreover, the Chechen leaders are happy with this position, since they receive tangible economic and political benefits from their membership in the federation but are free of any obligations in return. Chechnya, whose ties with all regions of the Russian Federation are both legal and broad, is not subject to the laws of Russia. Hence, it is a magnet for the most dangerous kinds of criminal activity. According to available data, Chechnya receives more funds from Russia via illegal channels than it could receive legally from either Russia or the Islamic states.

The majority of Russian citizens express dissatisfaction with their government's Chechen policy. However, this dissatisfaction is largely passive and does not lead to open protest in areas not adjacent to Chechnya. The most widespread desire is simply to forget about Chechnya and halt any federal investments there.

However, Chechnya does not let itself be forgotten. Chechen armed raids on neighboring border territories are becoming the norm. These raids reflect the immediate economic interests of individual outlaw groups (cattle theft and kidnaping), as well as the strategic goals of Chechnya's influential political circles. They spread fear in the border areas and force non-Chechen peoples to leave.

Moscow's lack of a clear position leaves the border with Chechnya inadequately protected. In this circumstance, the residents of territories adjacent to Chechnya (Dagestan, Stavropol and the Krasnodar region (*krai*)) attempt to defend themselves.

In Dagestan, the head of the Dagestan Security Council, Magomed Talboev, favors forming self-defense detachments. He would arm a home guard manned by border village residents. This would essentially mean only people from the Avarian and Lak villages, since neither the Dagestan Chechens nor the Turkic peoples of Dagestan would join such detachments. Initially, both Moscow and Makhachkala viewed this idea with suspicion. They had misgivings about creating another militarized, non-state organization formed along ethnic lines (like the Cossacks). Dagestan authorities were more concerned about the domestic consequences of such a step. Once created, such detachments could easily become an important trump card in the power struggle now heating up in Dagestan. However, the border-village residents were dissatisfied about their vulnerability to attack and forced Dagestan authorities to allow the so-called people's hosts of the Soviet period. More than 3,000 people have joined these hosts, and although the state has not yet armed them, they all have their own weapons.

Like Dagestan, the Stavropol region (especially its predominantly Cossack-populated Kursk area that borders on Chechnya) sustains enormous moral and material harm from Chechnya. According to the governor of the Chernogorov region (*krai*), in 1997 alone armed bandits from Chechnya stole just under \$200 million in animals and farm machinery from the animal husbandry farms, motor pools and farms immediately adjacent to the Chechen border. The indigenous inhabitants leave the settled areas, which are then immediately taken over by new settlers from Chechnya. Chechen control posts have encroached on Stavropol's territory, facilitating Chechen occupation of farm lands. The police provide virtually no security for the local residents. In late 1997, 500 border-region residents met in a Stavropol Cossack village.<sup>7</sup> The ataman of the



Terek Cossack Army took part, as did regional administrative officials. The assembly adopted an appeal to the president of Russia seeking protection from relentless raids by Chechens who take hostages, steal equipment and rustle livestock. Cossack villages also demanded the right to form self-defense detachments.

Ingushetia (also called the Ingush Republic) claims an area known as the Prigorodnyy region (*rayon*) in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alaniya. Chechnya's influence on Ingushetia's claim is growing. Although it is very unlikely that armed Chechen formations will overtly "liberate" the Prigorodnyy region and the right-bank portion of Vladikavkaz, Chechnya's involvement in the conflict is growing markedly. Armed Chechen groups have been spotted in outlying areas in both the Prigorodnyy region and the Ingush Republic.

Chechen separatists and criminals see the territories adjacent to the Russian Federation as a source for criminal profit. The most prevalent crimes include hostage taking; kidnaping; robbery; and theft of livestock, agricultural equipment and vehicles. According to data from the Russian Internal Affairs Ministry, approximately 700 organized criminal groups made up of North Caucasus emigrants are active in Russia. A significant portion of these are either Chechen or have Chechen involvement.

In the meantime, the federal government recognizes Chechnya as a normal constituent member of the Russian Federation, making it almost impossible to guard the border effectively. The armed forces have no legal grounds to control of the flow of people and cargo in and out of Chechnya, nor do they have any clear rules of conduct.

Moreover, the Russian federal government has no economic whip or carrot for Chechnya. Chechnya, on the other hand, has a tiny section of the Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline that it can use as a weapon for extortion.

Moscow's options for action in Chechnya are limited. A renewed attempt to solve the Chechen problem through military force is out of the question, as is recognizing Chechnya's independence. In addition to contravening the federal constitution, recognizing Chechnya would also entail several extremely dangerous consequences for Russia, the most serious of which would be losing control over Chechnya's foreign relations. Accordingly, Russia would be unable to prevent Chechnya from becoming a transit base for weapons, narcotics and contraband into Russia or a laundering area for dirty money. Rather than solving all the problems dis-

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cussed above, recognizing Chechnya would probably only exacerbate them.

The way out of the North Caucasus crisis is through solid economy in the region. Without this, prospects for stabilizing the situation are not promising. Naturally, raising the region's economic level will take time, because this issue is closely linked to the Russian Federation's overall situation. If we expect an instant fix for the economic problems underlying the crisis in the region, we deceive ourselves.

Russia needs to clearly define the parameters of a unified national policy for resolving the Chechnya problem. In fact, Russia already has a very clear policy: Chechnya remains a constituent member of the Russian Federation, and a decision on the republic's status has been postponed until 31 December 2001.

Russia has maintained this same approach throughout the entire Chechen conflict, a fact documented in accords, memorandums of understanding and statements signed during the negotiation process. President Boris Yeltsin has signed approximately 40 executive orders and decrees to settle the crisis. To implement them, the Russian federal government has adopted some 50 resolutions and created special government commissions.

Both the Russian and international press often portray me as a hawk, advocating forcible resolution of the Chechen issue. This is not the case. As deputy prime minister of the Russian Federation, minister of the Interior, I was responsible for Russia's public safety. Chechnya is a part of Russia. Because of well-known circumstances, Chechnya is temporarily outside the federation's jurisdiction. Nonetheless, events in that republic and

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the constant threats to public security issuing from there kept my constant attention and forced me to respond. In those instances when the Chechen leadership was unable or did not wish to curb crime and terrorism on its own, I was bound by my office to address those threats.

At the same time I would like to emphasize that I stood directly at the headwaters of the negotiation process as early as 1995. Even today I believe that all the critical issues must be solved with negotiations, not with cannons or machineguns. The specific approaches to settlement, the best forms for resolution of disputed points and how the negotiations should be organized—these are all a different matter. Even the best options do not always prove acceptable. Chechnya's inconsistent positions, ambitious pretensions and constant abrogation of previous understandings require different negotiation tactics. The result is often a stalemate in the negotiations.

In my opinion, conceding to Chechnya and consenting to full, legal separation without resolving even one key problem of the crisis could worsen conditions in the conflict zone. It could also substantially restrict Russia's ability to influence the area and forestall the dangers arising from it. At the same time, we cannot continue a policy that ignores obvious facts. For instance, if Chechnya secedes from Russia, it could become a hothouse for international crime.

To settle the situation, we must first achieve a dramatic shift in the mass consciousness of the Chechens themselves. We must restore their confidence in Russian state institutions. Russian participation in Chechnya's social and economic restoration would help bring about this dramatic change in thinking. In arranging this help, we must assure that all funds reach their intended consumers, the

average citizens of Chechnya, who are also citizens of Russia.

It would be unwise to invest funds in Chechnya without ensuring that these funds would not be used to Russia's detriment. Hence, such investments should be clearly linked to the results of negotiations.

It is also very important to involve the Chechen diaspora in the peace process, those in Russia and elsewhere, to help monitor the distribution and use of incoming funds. As Russia negotiates, it cannot ignore the interests of citizens of other nationalities living in Chechnya. Many of them were forced to leave Chechnya, but that fact does not strip them of their right to participate in deciding the republic's fate.

As it pursues its Chechnya policy, Russia should make extensive use of its diplomatic capabilities and also seek international condemnation of terrorist and criminal activity in the Chechen Republic. It must attempt to win public support from the world's leading countries, including those of the Islamic world. Russia would benefit from these nations' support of its peace initiatives and its recommendations to Chechen leaders that they act in accordance with international law. Many well-known foreign political leaders and diplomats view a settlement in Chechnya as Russia does. This important factor can affect the course of negotiations.

If the Chechen leadership continues to push for immediate Russian recognition of Chechnya's independence, sooner or later we will have to make a choice. We will have to accept their demand (and as noted earlier, this will not resolve the overall problem), or we will have to compartmentalize the situation. In other words, we will have to recognize the republic's special status as a "rebel territory," with all the inherent consequences. Such an approach would change any impression that foreign political activity by Chechen separatists is legitimate. It would also limit separatist contacts undesirable to Russia. At the same time, this approach would make it possible to provide a legal basis for guarding the borders with Chechnya. Because of its location and the nature of its demographic and economic development, Chechnya is fated to have an alliance with Russia. It simply cannot survive otherwise. Time will put everything in its place. However, the government needs more than just patience; it needs wisdom and political will. Unfortunately, the latter are in short supply. Be that as it may, Russia cannot jeopardize its national interests in the North Caucasus. It must do everything it can to

protect the population from crime and terrorism.

The negotiation process will certainly continue. In addition to continuing this process, Moscow's ability to react to any complications should be further enhanced. In the talks with the leaders of the Chechen Republic, we must address the issue of eradicating terrorist training centers located in Chechnya, and we should propose combined forces to achieve this goal. In the event that the Chechen side refuses, then Russia must reserve the right to act unilaterally to destroy these centers using all means available, including military and technical means. This is Russia's natural and accepted role, to safeguard its national security.

To settle the Chechen and Northern Caucasus problem, Russia needs to involve religious leaders and elders, the heads of the tribes (*teip*) and other similar organizations and the leaders of the Cossack communities. These voices must promote tolerance and accord. They must also serve as catalysts to mobilize the citizenry against crime and as mediators to reconcile the parties to conflicts that may arise. The media also have an important role to play in stabilizing the situation. The media often side with one of the parties and fail to provide objective information, sometimes merely carrying out a social agenda.

Regardless of what may happen, as it expands the negotiation process, Russia should not force the Chechen leadership (militarily or economically) into signing a treaty that suits only Moscow. The leaders need time to consider the wisdom of self-determination, to experience all the consequences of the isolation into which they are driving the republic. This would also allow formation of a government that expresses the interests of the nation

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rather than one which simply asserts the right to govern. Such a government could pull people together to establish order and build something, rather than engage in terrorism, robbery and traffic in human beings.

Moscow should not openly emphasize Chechnya as an object of primary attention. It would make more sense to focus on and support this region's other Russian Federation members, which would significantly lower the social tension in the republics and regions (*krais*) of the North Caucasus. It would also force the Chechen leaders to be more tactful when receiving Russian assistance.

The federal center cannot allow obstinacy and lawlessness to occur with impunity. It would be highly beneficial to demonstrate the real economic and social advantages of loyalty and stability. Moscow could best demonstrate those advantages in the areas of the North Caucasus that have already developed a favorable political climate for economic growth. **MR**

#### NOTES

1. General Kulikov wrote this article in the summer of 1998 for a working visit to the United States. He wrote it as an oral presentation titled "The Chechen Problem as a Destabilizing Factor in the North Caucasus; Threats to Russia's Security." The original text has been edited here for style. [Translator's note]

2. Russia uses the term "Near Abroad" to refer to the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union; hence, "Far Abroad" here refers to any countries beyond the bounds of those newly independent states. [Translator's note]

3. An Imamate is a region governed by a Moslem scholar/leader, or Imam. [Translator's note]

4. Wahhabism is a religious-political movement in Sunni Islam. It arose in Arabia in the mid-18th century based on the teachings of Mohammed ibn-Abdul Wahhab. Modern Wahhabism is a politicized expression of Islamic fundamentalism and preaches the affirmation of its own supreme authority in Islam, as well

as that of Islam over society. The idea of the jihad, or holy war against infidels, occupies a prominent place.

5. The Khasavyurt agreement mentioned here refers to the peace treaty worked out between then Russian Security Council Secretary General Alexander Lebed, and Aslan Maskhadov, then Chechen chief of staff. The agreement may have stopped the war, but it only shelved until 2001 the question of whether Chechnya would remain part of the Russian Federation or become independent. [Translator's note]

6. At the time of his death, Dzhokhar Dudaev was by far the most popular Chechen national leader, having won a 1991 presidential election by a huge majority. Dudaev was killed by a Russian rocket in April 1996. [Translator's note]

7. The village was Galyugayevsk. [Translator's note]

*Until March 1998 General Anatoliy S. Kulikov held the dual post of Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD) and Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. Prior to becoming Interior Minister, he commanded Russia's MVD Internal Troops, a force that numbered in excess of 400,000 troops when he accepted that post in 1992. In 1995 he became commander in chief of all Russian forces, both MVD and Ministry of Defense, in Chechnya. A graduate of Russia's Frunze Academy and the General Staff Academy, he has twice visited Fort Leavenworth, once in the summer of 1994 and again in the summer of 1998.*

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